

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
PROGRESS REPORT
2013

Participant Update

As of December 2013, there are 1,815 certified Master Hunters in good standing. Find below a summary of participation in the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) since 2010. The MHPP replaced the former Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008. There was no open enrollment period for calendar year 2013. Enrollment was closed to allow WDFW time to review the program, clarify its role, and to identify strategies that better engage members in high-priority volunteer work.

Table of Certified Master Hunters

	2010	2011	2012	2013*
Applicants	806	708	510	0
Newly certified	150	132	83	2*
Renewals	241	163	210	207
Total certified	1,956	1,975	1,938	1,815

* There were two applicants from 2012 that were not certified until 2013 due to administrative issues.

The number of Master Hunters failing to renew their certifications has averaged about 43.7% each year since 2010

Master Hunters Failing to Renew

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Failed to renew	209	140	144	145
Percentage	46.4%	46.2%	40.7%	41.2%

Master Hunter Advisory Group

During the 2013 calendar year, Mike Britton was chair of the Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) through March, and Jim Fitzgerald served as chair for the remainder of the year.

The MHAG conducted three formal business meetings in 2013, all in Ellensburg. All meeting notices were posted in advance on the MHPP webpage as were notes from meetings held on March 15th, July 19th, and September 27th:

http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/advisory_groups/meeting_notes.html

Program Refinements

Administrative responsibility for the MHPP was transferred, along with the Hunter Education Division, from the Law Enforcement Program to the Wildlife Program on July 1, 2013. The Wildlife Program, with input and concurrence from the Master Hunter Advisory Group, adopted a policy statement detailing the role of Master Hunters and how the Department will utilize them. The policy statement was adopted in October 2013, and can be found on the MHPP webpage at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/policies_procedures.html.

The Hunter Education Division, in cooperation with the MHAG, is in the process of reviewing Master Hunter certification and re-certification requirements, as well as the development of new Operating Procedures to reflect refinement of the advisory group's roles and responsibilities. A Strategic Plan is also under development for the MHAG. Two new MHPP applicant tests have also been jointly developed by WDFW and the MHAG which will be used for the first time in 2014.

An emphasis will be placed in the future on combining Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) with the proctoring of MHPP applicant examinations.

Communications and Outreach

Members of the MHAG routinely met with WDFW Regional staff in order to foster closer working relations and identify volunteer efforts to address priority agency needs.

MHAG members were also provided contact information for all certified Master Hunters living in their respective Regions and many have begun the process of creating email group communications systems.

Policy and Programmatic

An Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant was awarded to MHAG member Mike Britton to conduct a pilot effort to assist with the coordination of volunteers within WDFW Region 1 (Spokane). The general focus of the effort is currently on facilitation of game damage control using Master Hunters, but other important volunteer efforts are also being successfully coordinated. Specific goals of the project include: increasing use of Master Hunter volunteers; decreasing WDFW staff resources used to train and utilize volunteers; coordinating landowner, WDFW staff, and Master Hunter services; assisting WDFW staff in landowner contacts; and helping facilitate the WDFW Citizen Science initiative. Due to the mild winter, little deer and/or elk damage to private property had occurred by the end of calendar year 2013. Mr. Britton has reported that there are still more volunteers available than projects.

The Central Washington University Hunter Behavior Study has been discontinued due to inadequacy of the data. Confidence limits were exceeded for much of the analyzed information thus compromising its reliability. The raw data has been collected by Anthony Novak, WDFW Region 6 Conflict Specialist, and will be stored by the Hunter Education Division in Olympia.

The Hunter Education Division (now in the Wildlife Program) has filled a new position in WDFW Region 4, located in the Mill Creek office. The position is responsible for the coordination of wildlife-related volunteer work (50%) and Hunter Education Division work (50%). This will substantially enhance WDFW's ability to utilize Master Hunters (as well as other volunteers) on priority projects. The position will also increase the Department's capacity in assisting and

coordinating volunteer Hunter Education Instructors, resulting in improved customer service to hunter education students. While these activities will occur within Region 4, positive effects will be realized across the Westside as well at a statewide level.

Five members of the MHAG were appointed by Director Phil Anderson in December 2013 for terms beginning in March 2014. These appointments consist of new members and reappointments, and include Bill Zachmann, (Olympia), Jim Zimmerman (Olympia), Jim Slyfield (Kirkland), John McGlenn (Bellevue), and Tom Conrads (Richland). Regional representation, as required by the MHAG bylaws, is retained with these appointments.

The Wildlife Program in cooperation with the MHAG developed a pilot variance of the Master Hunter Hunt Coordinator Guidelines for use in WDFW Region 6 (Montesano). The test effort will provide more flexibility for WDFW Conflict Specialists to use Master Hunters to address game damage. When the WDFW Conflict Specialist determines that an emergency exists and a response to ongoing game damage is required in fewer than 12 hours, the Hunt Coordinator may use a subset of the ranked list that includes Master Hunters living nearest to where the damage is occurring; living in the county where damage is occurring; or living in the county and in adjacent counties where damage is occurring. The necessary skill set required will be verified when Master Hunters are contacted to participate. Master Hunters not having the appropriate skill set will not be asked to participate.

Program Integrity

During 2013, no Master Hunters were removed from the MHPP for life due to a conviction related to a Title 77 RCW violation. This is the fourth year that the special Master Hunter identifier (MH) has appeared on WDFW licensing, which is intended to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules.

Future Direction

Currently, individuals applying to become Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 20 hours of approved volunteer conservation hours, and existing Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer conservation hours every five years in order to renew their certification. The majority of volunteer effort by Master Hunters is still being provided to organizations and agencies other than WDFW. The new Wildlife Program Policy for the Master Hunter Permit Program is expected to serve as the stimulus to promote increased use of Master Hunters by WDFW to address priority needs of the Wildlife Program Divisions. These priorities include game damage control, private lands access, hunter recruitment and retention, Wildlife Area habitat improvement, Access Area improvement, Hunter Education, data collection, and the strengthening of the image and heritage of hunting in Washington.

Once sufficient meaningful volunteer work is identified by WDFW and Master Hunters are substantially engaged, the volunteer hour requirements for certification and re-certification will be reviewed.

Joint efforts between the Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC), MHAG, the Hunter Education Instructor Advisory Committee (IAC), as well as other stakeholder groups will likely be undertaken to identify and address impediments to hunter recruitment and retention. See the 2012 MHPP Annual Progress Report for related recommendations. In addition, benefits associated with coordination and communication of work elements between GMAC and MHAG would be improved by cross representation on the two advisory groups.

More of an emphasis will likely be placed on engaging Master Hunters in Hunter Education Training, as well as and future Hunter Training Clinics conducted by WDFW.

Once the MHAG Strategic Plan is finalized, it will be used to establish an annual work plan and expectations, and guide prioritized work of the MHAG and WDFW.

Consideration should be given to establishing a First Time Hunter Tips section as part of the MHPP webpage.